

The Interceptor

Story: The Interceptor

Storylink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/8275515/1/>

Category: Lion King

Genre: Adventure/Romance

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Authorlink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3365186/>

Last updated: 07/04/2012

Words: 11542

Rating: T

Status: Complete

Content: Chapter 1 to 7 of 7 chapters

Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: Simba is chased across the land by a psychotic lion known only as the Interceptor. Can he escape in time?

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: The Royal Challenge Authority

AN: You know, here in Britain we get a lot of strange, weird game shows. We get these shows beamed in from Japan that show a bunch of people trying to storm a castle owned by some person known as Takeshi. We never see him, but he's always there, apparently. We also get giant crystal mazes; bulls playing darts; and greed, greed, greed. Can't have a game show without greed.

Well, one of these game shows goes by the name of *The Interceptor*. And, of course, it came to be one of my favourites because of its sheer insanity factor. I myself am insane, as you all know. So, here's a story inspired by one of the weirdest game shows out there. Simple, but still weird. And also a little bit funny. You'll see.

The Interceptor

Chapter One: The Royal Challenge Authority

Simba didn't understand how there were so many evil – or crazy – people in the world. And how they all seemed to be out to get him. What, was Simba the sole hero in the world who needed a good beating? Either that or the Pride Lands just seemed to get in the way of their evil deeds. Whatever the case, Simba knew that almost every day there would be some kind of foe to overcome.

"Okay, who are you?" Simba asked, walking towards the cub who had suddenly burst into the den. "This is a private den. We don't normally just let people come in as they please." A look of realisation suddenly crossed his face. "Man, I'm beginning to sound like Zazu."

"At least that proves you have intelligence," Haiba pointed out, joining Simba by his side. "I guess so, anyway."

"Are you quite finished with your pathetic conversation?" asked the cub, looking like he'd much rather be somewhere else. That was something quite uncommon with most villains who came to the kingdom. They didn't want to be anywhere *but* the Pride Lands. Takeover plots were – as anyone could guess – very common.

"Ooh, sorry!" Simba said sarcastically. "Don't want to spoil your day. Well, evening – but you get what I mean."

The cub cleared his throat. "My name is Kazi, and—"

"Oh, brilliant," said Simba, rolling his eyes. "I just came back from a place called Camp Kazi, and now I've got to speak to someone who has Kazi as their *name*. Can this day get any worse?"

Kazi glowered at Simba, before speaking again. "I represent the Royal Challenge Authority – a regulation of all royal challenges."

"Really?" said Nala, her eyes half open. "Never would have guessed." She was ready to collapse unconscious right about now. She couldn't believe that right when they had come back from an adventure, another one had presented itself before them.

"Wait, wait, wait." Simba sat down, staring up at the ceiling. "Royal Challenge Authority? You're telling me that someone set up something like that based on the Royal Challenge?"

"That was a nasty one," said Haiba, remembering the deadly problems that had been caused as a result of the Royal Challenge. "Lucky that cub went and launched himself off the edge of a cliff, isn't it? Otherwise we all would have been well and truly *doomed*."

"Well put, Haiba," retorted Simba. "Look, just what the heck are you here for? Make it quick. I've got very busy things to be doing right now."

"No, you haven't," Haiba whispered, only to be nudged hard in the stomach by Simba. "*Ooff!*" he cried, collapsing to the ground.

"He wasn't supposed to know that!" Simba yelled.

"I'll make a mental note not to make that mistake again," Haiba said in a wheezy voice.

"Thank you. So..." Simba made a move towards Kazi, stepping on Haiba's chest and causing him to cry out in pain.

"What do you want from me?"

"I have a very interesting challenge for you," Kazi told Simba. "Acting on behalf of my father, King Ghaibu, I have been ordered to order you to take on the order of the Royal Challenge Authority. This will thus ensure that you have completed the order that I have ordered you – acting on order – to do."

"Could you repeat that?" Haiba asked, still on the ground. "Sorry, it's quite difficult to hear when only one half of your body is working."

"I've gotta say I'm pretty confused," said Simba, scratching his head. "Can you make any sense of this, Nala?"

Turning to Nala, he quickly saw that she was asleep, snoring lightly.

"That's what I thought," he mumbled, before looking back at Kazi. "Look, Kazi, I don't know what kind of language they teach at your pride, but—"

Kazi sighed. "Look, it's a legal requirement of the times that you undertake this challenge. I've only recently become employed as a result of this... recent change."

Simba raised an eyebrow. "How recent?"

"Um... well, yesterday, actually," he replied, looking rather sheepish about the fact. "You're actually the second pride to agree to this new law."

"I never agreed to anything," Simba told Kazi. "Unless my parents just suddenly decided to— Oh." Turning towards the den opening, Simba shot a suspicious look at his parents, who were nervously poking their heads inside. "You arranged for this to happen, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, son," Mufasa replied, his eyes nervously darting around the inside of the den. "Um... gotta go."

With that, his parents disappeared from view, leaving Simba very unsurprised and disappointed. "My parents are weird," he said, before looking at Kazi. "Okay," he sighed. "What's this 'challenge' you speak of?"

"One of the greatest challenges to ever be invented," Kazi replied, a claw raised in the air. "It is simply called... The Interceptor."

"The Interceptor?" said Haiba. "I get the feeling this challenge isn't going to do any good for my current chest pains."

"Serves you right for messing up my 'very busy' excuse," Simba shot back. "Look, I don't know anything about this Interceptor thing, and I don't care either. Now, would you be so kind as to leave me and my friends alone? I honestly don't know how much more craziness I can take. Tell me, have you ever dug holes all day before?"

"I can't say I have," replied Kazi. "But I'm afraid that I cannot simply leave you alone. This challenge is compulsory."

"Never a good word," said Haiba.

"All right. If I do this challenge, then do I get to live out the rest of my life in peace?" Simba asked in a hopeful tone.

"Not exactly," said Kazi. "I can't guarantee you peace and happiness for the rest of your life, but I can ensure that you will not suffer interference from either myself or my father."

"Okay, great, that works for me," Simba said quickly. "Now just explain the rules to me. Come on, quick, quick, quick."

"The rules of The Interceptor are very simple," Kazi told them. "You and your male friend shall be placed in a random location – with which you will have no familiarity. You will have to get to another location – quite a distance away – and if you can get there within an hour, then you win."

"No problem," said Haiba, slowly getting to his paws. "Sign me up."

"Ah-ah-ah," said Kazi. "I'm afraid there's one little catch. You won't be alone while on your journey. A mad, crazy lion – the Interceptor – will be chasing

after you. If he catches you before you can get to your finishing location, then you lose." There was a pause. "And he gets to eat you."

"*Eat us?*" both Simba and Haiba exclaimed at the same time.

"Yes." Kazi nodded. "Oh, and if you run out of time, of course. What, did you think the challenge was going to be simple? Of course not. It's got to be at least a *little* bit difficult."

"It's a bit of a steep thing to ask of us," said Haiba.

"It's not steep. It's darn *vertical*, is what it is!" Simba exclaimed, his eyes wide. "You actually expect me and Haiba to run through the middle of nowhere, while being chased by a psychotic madman called the Interceptor?"

"Yes."

Simba stared at Kazi. "All right, we'll do it."

Chapter 2: Chapter 2: A Full Day of Training

Chapter Two: A Full Day of Training

Simba and Haiba stood outside the den, under the warm, orange glow of the setting sun. Kazi stood facing the two.

"You get one day of training," he told them. "I'd suggest that you work on your running skills, and – above all – communication skills. You won't get anywhere without a decent grasp of communicating with one another. Oh, and try not to get yourselves killed. It doesn't make for good entertainment."

"You're saying you're going to be *watching*?" asked Simba, unable to believe how calm this cub was about such a subject. And apparently he had only been given this task yesterday. He seemed to have taken to the job almost instantly.

"But of course," said Kazi. "I have to watch – and then report back to my father. I'll also be there to greet you when – sorry, *if* – you get to the finishing line. Simply meet me there, and you'll be perfectly all right."

"And if we don't?" asked Haiba.

"Then you'll end up in the stomach of the Interceptor, I'm afraid," came the reply. "Also, keep in mind that the Interceptor likes to digest his food slowly. It'll take your body about two or three days to die once inside his system. Rather painful, actually."

Simba stared at Kazi with disgust. "This is sick!" he exclaimed. "Come on, Kazi, can't you bend the rules so we don't have to do this?"

"My paws are tied," he said.

"No, they're not, they're completely free," Haiba said, pointing at Kazi's paws.

"It was a figure of speech," he told Haiba, frowning. "Look, I don't take great pleasure in doing this sort of thing, but there's simply nothing I can do. I'm sorry. All right?"

"It is definitely *not* all right," said Simba. "We could end up being slowly eaten by some snarling, slimy sicko! Just who came up with this challenge?"

"Oh, it was developed by the very best of kings," Kazi explained. "Mainly, your father and my father."

"And how come *you* aren't involved in the challenge?" Haiba asked.

"They were very interested in testing you," Kazi told them. "Particularly you, Simba. It's funny, the way your parents talked about you almost made them sound as if they wanted you dead. And when I say 'dead', I mean ripped apart into a thousand pieces by a giant stick. A giant stick that just keeps bashing you and bashing you into tiny fragments. Fragments, which – eventually – will become so tiny that you can't even see them."

A very long, awkward silence followed this. A tumbleweed slowly rolled past before anyone spoke again.

"Very dead, then," Haiba concluded. "Okay, so maybe your parents *do* want you dead. I mean, first it was the digging holes all day, and now a mad chase with the Interceptor. What's next? Eating elephant vomit for dinner?"

"At least it wouldn't kill me," retorted Simba. "There's a fifty-fifty chance of us dying out there, you know. Just where the heck do we even start off?"

"I'm afraid I can't disclose that information," replied Kazi. "I suggest you use your day of training to the fullest possible extent."

"Just how did you get so proper?" Haiba wondered. "You speak like someone who's a hundred and eighty years old."

"I was very well educated," Kazi informed them. "Learned with some of the smartest animals around. Dumbo the Elephant. Professor Chicken. Why, even Pori the Intelligent Hornbill. There was never a dull moment during my schooling. Plus it also gave me a brain the size of an immense forest – metaphorically speaking, of course."

"Yes," Simba agreed. "Otherwise I'd probably be *living* in you! Tell me, Kazi, do I get a kind of... prize if I win this challenge?"

"Uh..." Kazi thought for a moment. "No. Uh, no, you don't. You just sort of... get to live, really."

Simba just smiled. "Yeah. Didn't think so. A hero's work is – sadly – never done. Still, at least it makes me stronger. And it gives me – on a more emotional level – a heightened sense of insanity. We can call it my sixth sense!"

"Well, I'd love to stay and chat," said Kazi, slowly backing away. "But I really should be returning to my pride. Lots of other important matters to attend to. I will return for you in exactly twenty-four hours' time. Be ready by then. Oh, and don't bother trying to run away. You see, I have a kind of sixth sense, too. Don't want to have to send the Interceptor after you *too* early now, do we?"

"Of course not. What would give you that impression?" said Haiba, shaking his head. He looked ready to burst into tears.

"Excellent." He gave them a little wave. "See you then."

Simba slowly pulled Haiba back into the den. "Well, that's just brilliant, isn't it? First a psychotic mermaid, then a psychotic camp counsellor, and now a psychotic stalker called the Interceptor. I feel psychotic myself, actually."

"Look, Simba, just keep it together, okay?" said Haiba. "As long as we keep our heads, we should be just fine. Finer than fine. The finest fine that you're ever going to get. I mean, we're good at running, aren't we? We do it every day. Our legs must be the strongest legs in the world. No Interceptor is going to be any match for us."

Simba nodded. "Yeah. Maybe you're right after all. If we just run and don't stop, then we'll be perfectly fine. We'll go so fast that we could probably do the course twice – and then the Interceptor *still* wouldn't be able to catch up. Isn't that right, Nala?"

All he got in response from her was a snore.

"Yes, yes." He nudged Haiba. "Come on. We'd better start exercising. Get all of our muscles so big that they're *bulging* with strength. Like all of those brainless cubs down by the water hole. You know, the ones who don't even know left from right."

"Yeah. It's always the nice cubs around here who get girlfriends," Haiba noticed. "I mean, look at Tiny Tojo. He's probably making out with that hot girlfriend of his every single day – which is more than I can say for myself. A tiny, squeaky cub gets more action than me. I think the world is coming to an end. I really do."

"This isn't the time right now to think about romance, Haiba," Simba told him, before heading out of the den. "Come on. We've got important work to do. Press-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups; you name it. All that exercising stuff."

Haiba followed him. "Simba, I get the feeling that this is all going to end in tears. Lots and lots of tears. Is there a reason for that?"

"I feel the same way every day, Haiba," Simba revealed. "For me, it's *a/ways* going to end in tears. That's just the way my life is."

Haiba frowned. "I think you need to get a *new* life, Simba. One that doesn't involve getting yourself into trouble every single day."

"You related to my parents by any chance, Haiba?"

"Oh, come on. Even I'm not *that* bad."

AN: I can't help but feel like Simba deserves a break. Especially now that he's got to contend with an unseen madman known as the Interceptor. The suffering just never ends for him, does it? And to think that it's only the third story of the series. Aren't I such a lovely writer?

Anyway, leave your reviews, comments – or whatever it is this website is calling them these days – in their respective places. I'll be seeing you tomorrow for two more chapters of sheer insanity and utter nonsense. And a shameful parody of a relatively unknown British game show.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: Thoughts in the Darkness

AN: Crucial turning point for Simba here. You should be able to figure out what it is.

kora22: You watched it? Wow. That's some good reader dedication. Weird little show, isn't it? Never thought a psychotic villain in a helicopter chasing after English people could be so entertaining.

Haradion: Very... interesting theory you've got there. A diamond for every one of the Seven Deadly Sins? I might just steal that from you. Ha-ha-ha...

Chapter Three: Thoughts in the Darkness

That night, Simba lay awake, listening to nothing but the sound of Nala sleeping beside him, curled up with a smile on her face. He shared a lot in common with her, including exhaustion – especially at this point in time. But no matter how hard he tried to go to sleep, something seemed to be keeping him awake.

He felt so uncomfortable. It wasn't the hard ground, or the heat inside the den – persisting problems which he had since learned to deal with – but it was something else entirely.

His thoughts. His thoughts were keeping him awake. Usually, Simba liked to allocate his thinking time to earlier in the day. At night, he just wanted to sleep. Sleep like the dead. But right now, that wasn't going so well. That was probably what had started his random thoughts in the first place.

At night, if he ever started thinking for a prolonged period of time – something that didn't happen very often – then he liked to ponder on how things would have gone had they happened to someone else, and not him. Not him, or Nala, or even Haiba. What if all of these problems had happened to someone completely different? Some other cub. Would they just be stuck standing there with nothing to do, just watching as someone else went off on a dangerous adventure?

"Oh, look. There's a mad lion with a magic staff," Simba would probably say.

"Oh, just leave it to one of the other cubs, Simba. Let's just concentrate on standing here and doing nothing," Nala would most likely reply.

It made him wonder. If this hadn't happened – if Simba had never fought anyone or anything in his life – then would his life be better? The thought perplexed him. On the one paw, Simba would never injure himself, wouldn't have to suffer the emotional guilt and torment that often came with his heroic deeds, and he would be able to live out his life in relative peace and prosperity.

But on the other paw, if Simba had never decided to pursue more heroic interests, then he wouldn't have become both physically and mentally stronger. He would never have discovered the dark secrets that surrounded the kingdom that would one day belong to him. He never would have met Haiba. Then again, he couldn't tell whether that was a good thing or a bad thing. It was rather... ambiguous.

Right now, Simba wished this whole mess had happened to someone else. He wished that some other cub – far, far away – had been visited by Kazi, and forced to take part in this 'Interceptor' challenge. That way, he wouldn't have to suffer the awful torment that was sure to follow. He was going to have the most frantic hour of his life in the morning, and it would either end up with him keeping his life, or ending up in the stomach of some manic lion called the Interceptor. He dreaded to think how such a thing would feel.

So many things. All of them happening to him. Simba thought that when he'd killed Death – and that alone was hard to think about – things might quieten down a bit. All the... evil in the world might just calm down for a little while. He hoped that he would get a few days off. Maybe even a week away from doing all of this 'running around and stopping the bad guys' business that he was forced to do every single day.

It really wasn't fair. Why did he do it anyway? What was he trying to prove? In all honesty, no one really cared. He didn't even get so much as a 'thank you' anymore.

"What's that? You've saved our pride from a volcano that was seconds away from covering us all in lava? Oh, okay. See yourself out."

That's what it was like these days. It was only Nala and Haiba who seemed to appreciate the fantastic things that he accomplished. No one else spared him a second glance. Not even his parents...

Epecially his parents. It was they who had shunned him right from the start. Ever since he was a baby, all Simba had heard from his parents was 'don't do this' and 'stay away from that'. It was ridiculous. Who did they think he was? Some sort of insane, evil serial killer? Is that who they thought he was going to grow up to be?

They never cared. He'd saved the pride – the pride that he should probably be in charge of by now – countless times. So many people wanted the kingdom for their own gain, and Simba had stopped every one of them. Not his mother, not his father, but him. He had done it all.

"What's that, Simba? You saved me and your father from being crushed to death by thousands of stampeding wildebeest? You're grounded for two months, young man!"

No one cared. No one appreciated it at all. He had saved Hago and his villainous uncle, Scar, from taking over the entire kingdom. He had prevented Tama from killing Nala – and he had stopped her from taking her own life. He had even defeated the embodiment of all evil in the universe: Death. He had actually caused Death to... die.

And yet no one cared. After that night, no one said anything to him. He had brought them all back to life, and they didn't say a word. He just couldn't understand it. Everyone in this kingdom – everyone in the *world* – was so cruel to him. Why? What had he done to deserve this? Was there some curse placed on him that he knew nothing about? Was he doomed to be unnoticed and unappreciated for ever and ever?

Simba didn't know. It seemed that he was going to have to get used to the way things were going right now – because they were sure to stay that way for a very long amount of time. Either that, or...

Simba mentally scolded himself for thinking of such a thing. It was unthinkable. The very worst thing that he could do. The very worst one of them all. The number one thing that would ensure that he was going to get eternal darkness when he died.

Should I quit being a hero?

Simba gasped. He couldn't do that. He couldn't quit. Being a hero was all he knew. The only thing that got him up in the morning. Well, except for Nala. And Haiba when he was getting all clingy.

Being a hero made Simba proud of himself. That was probably the most apt answer he could come up with as to why he did what he had chosen to do. The feeling of helping others made him happy – even if the people he assisted weren't very grateful for it.

The thought persisted. *Just quit, Simba*, he told himself. *Quit, quit, quit. No one will even care. No one will even notice. Just give it all up. That way, all your trouble will be over. You can do whatever you want. Give up...*

The thoughts hissed in Simba's mind. *Give up... Give up...* He shook his head, returning to his senses.

Simba sat up, looking toward the outside of the den. It was still dark. Very dark, actually. There were hardly any stars in the sky that night. Somehow, he had lost faith in his father's notion that every star represented one of the Great Kings of the Past. If the number of stars in the sky were different each night, then just where did these 'Great Kings' go? Were they taking a break or something?

Simba sighed, knowing that he was just starting to think wildly again. He always did that whenever he was bored. His thoughts just seemed to jump all over the place and do as they pleased. His life seemed so confusing at times.

Give up...

"Simba," a voice whispered in his ear.

Simba almost let out a cry of surprise when he saw that Haiba was sat next to him. "Haiba!" he hissed, before speaking in a whisper. "What are you doing up at this time of night?"

Haiba gave him a funny look. "Who are you, my mother?" he retorted with a smile. "Look, I couldn't help but notice that you seemed very 'thoughtful'. In other words, you looked like you were having trouble getting to sleep."

"What was your first clue?" Simba asked sarcastically. "I mean, considering we have to do this Interceptor thing, I'm kinda starting to freak out." He didn't mention the idea of him quitting his heroic work. It didn't seem the right time or the right place for something like that.

"Can't say the idea is all that thrilling," said Haiba. "But we should be fine. As long as we don't fall into a hole and get stuck there. Then the Interceptor will have us for dinner before you can say, 'Oops, I screwed up.'"

"Please don't mention holes," Simba said, wincing at the thought of the gruesome time he spent at Camp Kazi. It may have only been a day, but it was a day that he never wanted to think about ever again. "It's not gonna be very inspiring when we're out in the middle of nowhere."

"No plan, then?" Haiba asked. "I mean, that would be nice for once. That would be *great*, actually. Something that says we've actually thought about what we're going to do."

"There's not really much of a plan you can make," Simba told him. "But let's just start with the basics. We stick to the rules, okay?"

Haiba nodded. "Okay."

"Other than that, we stay together, and don't split up. Splitting up is *never* a good thing. We just go as fast as possible, and if we get cornered by this Interceptor guy, then we hide. It's as simple as that."

"It's something, I guess," said Haiba. "You told Nala yet?"

"She hasn't woken up," Simba replied. "I'll tell her in the morning. You'd better get some rest anyway, Haiba."

"You should, too."

"I will – if I can get to sleep first."

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: Psychically Tuned

Chapter Four: Psychically Tuned

Simba had drifted in and out of sleep that night, his mind plagued with that one little thought that he soon regretted. That one little word had caused him to feel nothing but guilt for the rest of the night.

Quit.

His eyes flickering open, Simba looked around the den, noticing that everyone but he, Nala and Haiba had disappeared. Where did they all go this early in the morning? Things in the Pride Lands were just getting stranger and stranger. That was something he would most likely have to investigate at another time. Another mystery to add to the seemingly neverending list.

"Nothing changes," Simba muttered, before climbing to his paws. A sharp pain shot up through one of his forelegs, causing him to cry out in surprise and collapse to the ground. "Ow! Oh, no, no, no..." Simba stared at the leg with horror. "Please, no. Not today. *Please* not today."

He couldn't believe it. On the morning that he was going to have to run at his very best, his leg had suddenly decided to start aching. Aching pretty badly. He didn't know if he could *walk*, let alone *run*. The misery that Simba felt was impossible to describe. "Sometimes I really, really, *really* hate my life."

Slowly and agonisingly, Simba climbed to his paws. He had spent the whole of yesterday evening exercising with Haiba. This seemed to be the result. A leg that felt like it was ready to fall off.

"Ready, Simba?" Haiba was suddenly standing right next to him, hopping energetically from left to right. "Ready for our fight to the death with the Interceptor? I know I am. My legs are springier than the average lioness this morning."

"At least *someone's* happy," Simba replied, rubbing his swollen, aching leg with a paw. "I can barely move my leg."

Haiba prodded Simba's injured leg, causing him to wince in pain. "I see what the problem is," he said. "All that exercising – combined with the hard labour you did at Camp Kazi yesterday – must have caused your leg to kinda... stop working."

"Couldn't it have happened tomorrow instead?" Simba complained, hopping up and down to try and get his leg working again. But that only seemed to make it throb with pain. "Ow! Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!"

"Did someone say 'ow'?" asked Nala, slowly rising from her spot on the ground with a long, drawn-out yawn. "Did you accidentally sit down on your tail again, Simba? I told you before: look before you sit."

"It's my leg, actually," Simba informed her. "On the worst possible day, too."

"What are you talking about, Simba?" Nala asked, rubbing one of her eyes with a paw. "I just had the loveliest dream about quitting this hero job and living out the rest of my life in peace and happiness."

"I *didn't* dream," Simba told her, "because I didn't sleep."

"Simba's just cranky because we have to do this crazy challenge," Haiba explained. "You know that guy who visited us last night?"

Nala nodded. "The one who sounded like he was about nine times his age?"

"Yep. That's the one. Well, you see, me and Simba have kinda been forced into this challenge. Basically, we've gotta run away from this guy called the Interceptor – or he gets to eat us," Haiba explained. "Exciting, isn't it?"

"At least we still have a few more hours to exercise," said Simba. "It's a good while before Kazi will come back to get us ___"

"I'm back!" Kazi exclaimed, walking into the den with a smile on his face. "I hope you two are ready. The Interceptor doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"What?" Simba exclaimed, stumbling over to Kazi. "You said you'd be back in twenty-four hours!"

"It *has* been twenty-four hours," Kazi retorted. "You seem to have lost track of time."

And then it all suddenly made sense. It came as no surprise that everyone had disappeared. "You mean I've... *slept in*?" Simba cried. His eyes rolled into the back of his head and he collapsed, only to be held up by Haiba.

"Come on, Simba," he said, patting him on the cheek. "This is no time to faint. What would Nala say?"

"I'd say I'm very confused!" she yelled. "Who goes around just giving out stupid challenges like that?"

"We at the Royal Challenge Authority aim to please," said Kazi with a smile. "I'm sure you'll be thoroughly entertained throughout your participation in this task."

"My participation?" said Nala. "I thought this was just for Simba and Haiba."

"Not quite. You see, these two won't know where they are, and it'll be up to you to guide them," Kazi explained.

"And how am I supposed to do that?" Nala asked. "Just shout into the clouds and hope they'll hear me?"

"Oh, hearing you won't be too much of a problem," Kazi said, before holding out his paw, revealing himself to be holding a few glittering little stones. "I've got some psychic pollen for you. Eat it and you can hear each other easily. Just think something in your head and the other will hear it."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," said Haiba, stepping forward. "The last time we had psychic pollen, we ended up having to fight off the King of Dreams. I don't think that stuff is safe to be digested."

"Exactly," agreed Simba, raising a claw. "It's probably just a trick to make it easier for us to lose."

"I shall eat one myself," Kazi told them, "to prove that they are completely safe. Plus I need to keep an eye on what you're saying, too. Don't want you cheating or anything like that."

Kazi popped one of the glittering pieces of psychic pollen into his mouth, swallowing it in one go. "There we go. Now you can eat them, too."

Nala stared at the pieces of psychic pollen. "All right, you win," she said, before popping one into her mouth and swallowing it. "Guess it must work differently when you swallow one instead of sniffing it up."

Simba and Haiba both swallowed the remaining psychic pollen fragments. "Okay, so let's test it out," said Simba. "Nala, think something."

"Okay." Nala closed her eyes.

I love you, Simba.

I love you too, Nala.

Nala's eyes snapped open. "Wow. That's pretty cool."

"Then it's settled," said Kazi. "You are now psychically tuned. Nala, you will be assisting Simba and Haiba throughout the challenge, giving them directions and also warning them when the Interceptor is near. Plus, on the bright side, you get to survive whether they win or lose."

"Oh, great," said Nala flatly. "I can't wait."

"So what happens now?" Simba asked.

"Oh, that's simple," replied Kazi. "But I'm afraid I have to knock you out now."

"What?"

Thwack!

AN: I'd say that Simba getting knocked out has become a running gag by now. Anyone notice the return of the psychic pollen? Seemed like a good way to get around the communication barrier. Also, did you notice Simba's thoughts and feelings? The mere notion of him quitting seems so surreal. But you never know...

***Chapter 5*: Chapter 5: Let the Games Begin**

AN: Time to meet the dastardly, psychotic, totally-not-stolen-from-a-British-game-show character of the Interceptor. Is he mean? Oh, yeah. Of course he is!

kora22: I suppose a blindfold would have been more suitable, but then where would our three favourite cubs be without a little head trauma? Being fair is no fun – especially for the seedy villains that I write up!

KaylaDestroyer: Simba quitting? That would just be ridiculous. It's not like the constant pressure he suffers day in, day out will affect his heroic business in the slightest. Actually, you may be on to something there...

Chapter Five: Let the Games Begin

Simba didn't know where he was. All he knew was that he had a throbbing headache. Probably the sixth of that week. He couldn't understand what people's obsessions were with knocking him unconscious with a hard whack to the head. It was rather insane. So insane that – of course – he couldn't understand it at all. What he wouldn't mind right now was a nice scalp massage. Preferably from Nala. That would calm him down in no time at all. After all, didn't the Prince of the Pride Lands deserve a little pampering every now and then?

When Simba's eyes flickered open, all he could see was the vast expanse of dirt that was laid out before him. To his left were some trees. Some sort of jungle-like area – but not as big as the jungle near the Pride Lands, so that obviously wasn't his current location. To his right was a long river that snaked through the hard dirt ground. It seemed to run on for miles and miles. At least he had a ready supply of water available. He wasn't going to die of dehydration and sheer exhaustion within the next hour.

Maybe being rendered unconscious had helped somehow. Technically, he'd been asleep, right? That had to have built up some inner strength that he didn't know he even had. Maybe that was the advantage he needed – the advantage that would allow him to outrun the Interceptor and win this crazy challenge.

And to think he wouldn't even get a prize for it. Life really sucked sometimes.

"Okay, Simba, where are you?" he asked himself, taking a few steps forward. The ground felt firm underneath his paws.

I can answer that question easily, Simba, said a voice in his head. A voice that Simba – much to his surprise – instantly recognised.

Nala? he exclaimed in shock. *How are you—*

Oh, keep up with the times, Simba, replied Nala in his head. *We ate the psychic pollen, then we got knocked out, and now I'm at the top of a very tall cliff, looking down at you from above. I can see everything from up here.*

Then where's Haiba? Simba asked. *What's he doing?*

Haiba's a little while away from you. He's woken up in that little jungle to your left. I'll talk to him in a minute. In the meantime, you've got to get out of there, Simba. Find the finishing line as fast as you can.

And just where is the finishing line? Simba asked, having no idea as to where this 'course' would end. For all he knew, it could be a hundred miles away. The prospect of covering that distance in just under an hour made him want to drown himself in that river over there. It would certainly be much less painful.

The finishing line is... Nala paused for a moment to gauge the distance. *I'd say two miles away.*

Two miles? exclaimed Simba. *This is going to kill me. I think it is. Nala, if I die, then don't feel bad – although a part of it really is your fault. Okay?*

Simba, you can do it, Nala assured him. *Just try and keep your energy up. If you get thirsty, then there's water for you to drink. This is going to be easy. Keep going straight ahead, and then you should reach a... giant rock of some kind. Like a big boulder. Go on. Start walking.*

Simba followed Nala's instructions, walking straight ahead. In the distance, he could just about make out some kind of rock formation – almost like a giant boulder. She was right. Obviously she had a very good vantage point from whatever cliff she was on top of. He just hoped she could get back down again...

Simba eventually reached the giant boulder. *Okay, I'm here,* he reported to Nala. *So what now?*

Uh... Nala thought for a moment. You need to try and cross the river. Once you've done that, just follow the river until you reach a thorny bush. When you get there, tell me. I've got to go. I need to tell Haiba what to do.

Okay, Simba nodded, heading in the direction of the river. It looked pretty wide, but it shouldn't be too much of a problem to get across. As long as he swam fast and didn't get dragged down by a giant piece of seaweed, then he should be fine. Talk to you later.

Good luck, Simba. Don't forget... I love you.

Do I really need to say 'I love you, too'? he retorted with a happy smile.

Of course not.

It doesn't matter. I'll do it anyway. I love you, too.

He heard Nala giggle.

"Oh, getting knocked out is healthy, I suppose," Haiba said to himself as he got to his paws. "Good for the brain. Keeps it pumping with blood. Lots and lots of blood. And blood is good – unless it's gushing out of you so fast that your eyeballs pop out. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Just where the heck am I?"

Haiba stared out at the jungle area he had woken up in. Many exotic plants and bushes surrounded him, along with trees that seemed to be thousands of years old, their branches strong and sturdy. "This isn't the jungle close to the Pride Lands," he realised. "This place looks *ancient*."

Haiba, can you hear me?

At first he was surprised to hear Nala's voice, but he soon remembered eating the psychic pollen before he had been knocked out. They could communicate telepathically – simply by thought. *Yeah, I can hear you, Nala,* Haiba replied. *What's up?*

Don't say that, she said. *I'm at the top of a cliff, looking right down at you, actually. I can see everything.*

What about Simba? asked Haiba. *Have you talked to him yet?*

Yep, said Nala. *I've already given him some directions. But now I've gotta try and get you two to meet up somewhere.*

Then where am I? Haiba asked. *And how far away from Simba is it?*

Not too far, Nala informed him. *The jungle you're in isn't too big. Nothing like the one by the Pride Lands. Turn to your left, and then go straight on from there. Be careful not to touch the spiky plants. I remember them from my old pride. Get one of those thorns in you and your whole body gets slowly poisoned. You'll die within the hour.*

Thanks for the info, Haiba said. *I'll try to swerve around these prickly little pests. What do I do then?*

You should come to the edge of the jungle, Nala explained. *From there, you'll see a river. Just get across it, and you'll come to a thorny bush. Don't touch it, though – you might explode. That's where Simba should be. Once you two have met up, it should be pretty simple from then to get you to the finishing line. I mean, I've seen no sign of the—*

Nala's voice was cut off by the sound of rustling in the bushes. Haiba swiftly whipped round, his eyes narrowing. "Is anyone there?" he shouted. He could sworn that he heard someone moving from nearby...

Haiba, what's wrong? Nala asked. *What's that noise?*

I... don't know, he responded. *Sounds like someone... moving in the bushes. I can't quite see anyone, though. Can you see anything?*

He heard Nala gasp. *Haiba! It's the Interceptor! He's in the bushes! Get the heck out of there now!*

Haiba heard a maniacal chuckle, and let out a cry of surprise as a terrifying figure leapt out from the bushes...

***Chapter 6*: Chapter 6: The Interceptor Strikes**

Chapter Six: The Interceptor Strikes

The Interceptor was certainly a threatening figure. He had a sleek blonde mane and dark, almost greyish fur. His eyes were a piercing brown. Haiba felt scared just by looking at him. *Evil never looked so good*, he thought with a chuckle.

"Uh, hello, Mr Interceptor, sir," Haiba mumbled, slowly backing away. "I hope you're not hungry. You wouldn't want to eat me. I'm just skin and bones. Ignore the belly. Most of that's just fat. Chewy, thick fat. You wouldn't want that. Why don't you just leave me alone and we'll forget all about this, huh?"

The Interceptor let out a loud screech. It sounded like the kind of screech an eagle would emanate before scooping up some prey in its talons. *Well, that's certainly an interesting quirk*, Haiba thought nervously. *Eagle screech. Wow. Let's hope that's the only thing he can do.*

Haiba had to admit, he didn't have the faintest idea of what to do. Should he run away? Would the Interceptor just run after him and have him on the ground in three seconds flat? He didn't know how skilled this intimidating lion was. But with a name like the Interceptor, how could you really blame him?

The Interceptor just chuckled, taking a few steps towards Haiba. "Don't bother trying to run away," he warned. "I'll just catch you. I'll catch you in three seconds flat."

Just as I suspected, Haiba thought, stifling a nervous gulp. "Uh... Well, it is funny that you should say that. But what else can I really do? Bye!"

With that, Haiba sprinted off in the opposite direction, leaving the Interceptor standing there with an evil smirk on his face.

The Interceptor laughed maniacally at the top of his voice. "*I like it!*" he yelled, before giving chase to Haiba, sprinting after him with ease. He had done this a thousand times. The name – the Interceptor – had been ingrained into his psyche for many years now. Was it his real name? Nobody knew. Was it his real name? Nobody knew. Why was even called that? Well, the answer to that was simple.

The Interceptor was quick. Quick, effective and most ruthless indeed. He was commonly hired as something of a speedy assassin. If someone wanted someone else dead, then the Interceptor was the right person to call. In just an hour he could chase down any grown lion and have him ripped to shreds in five seconds flat. He was simply too fast for them. Before they even knew it, they were dead. That's how swift and deadly the Interceptor was. No one had ever evaded him.

No one.

It came as no surprise that he had been hired for this particular job. The King and Queen of the Pride Lands had apparently wanted their son dead. Why was this? The Interceptor didn't know. He just did what he was told to.

They wanted their son dead, so they decided to stage a fake challenge. The Interceptor immediately knew how to accomplish this. He kidnapped the first cub he could find, and forced him into pretending to be a representative of the Royal Challenge Authority – something he had completely invented.

From then on, it was simple. He just made up a little game of sorts, naming it after himself. Made up a few rules, slapped them together and *voilà* – The Interceptor challenge was born.

All he had to do now was hunt Prince Simba down and murder him. The cannibalism thing had been completely made up, just to instil fear in their tiny little hearts. All he was going to do was slit their throats, preferably with a little bit of struggling involved. He loved it when his victims tried to put up a fight. It added a little bit of challenge to his task.

"Oh, I love this," the Interceptor said as he ran, his legs pumping with nothing but energy and sheer exhilaration.

He loved this. He loved the chase. It gave him such a thrill. A rush of excitement and sadistic pleasure that he couldn't help but enjoy to the fullest extent. He just loved chasing down lions and killing them. He enjoyed their fear. He thrived on it. It just showed how weak they really were. "*I like it!*"

Haiba tripped over a large, thick vine on the ground, and was sent sliding across the ground, smacking right into a tree. "Oh, no," he said frantically. "Oh, no, no, no." Clambering to his paws, Haiba turned around to find himself staring into the hard eyes of the Interceptor.

Letting out his eagle-like screech, the Interceptor made a clawing motion at Haiba, causing him to back up against the

large tree behind him. "There's no escape for you now," he said with a chuckle.

Thinking fast, Haiba began to scale the tree, grabbing for a branch and hoisting himself up onto it. "I'm outta here," Haiba muttered as he clambered up the tree, going higher and higher. So high that the Interceptor would never be able to catch him. He'd be safe up there for a while.

Haiba, what's going on? Nala's voice asked in his head.

It's the Interceptor, Haiba explained. *He was hiding in the bushes. He's chasing me, but I've managed to climb up a tree. I don't think he can get me from here.*

Just watch out, Nala advised. *Make sure he doesn't touch you – otherwise that's it. You lose, and he gets to eat you.*

Yeah, I know that bit, Haiba retorted. *Thanks for stating the obvious. Think you can get me out of this tree?*

If I can spot you, was Nala's reply. *Uh...* Haiba pictured Nala's eyes darting frantically around the land. *Oh! I see you! You're at the top of a tree! Try and jump to another tree! That way you'll stay out of the Interceptor's way, and he won't be able to catch you.*

Good advice, thought Haiba. *Thanks, Nala.*

No problem. Just be careful.

Duly noted.

"Come on, cub," said the Interceptor, staring up at Haiba from the bottom of the tree. "Come down. I'm not gonna hurt ya."

"Oh, yeah, sure," replied Haiba. "You're the one thing I've gotta watch out for – and then suddenly you're not going to hurt me? I'll believe that any day. Just stupid, aren't I?"

The Interceptor just made another eagle screech at him.

Shaking his head, Haiba turned to see the branch of another tree protruding out from a few feet away. If he could just jump from the branch he was currently on, then he should be able to reach the other tree...

But the Interceptor seemed to have anticipated the move that Haiba was going to make, and – screeching – attacked the trunk of the tree viciously, batting away at it with his claws.

The tree began to shake, and Haiba gasped at the sheer display of strength the Interceptor was showing right now. *Oh, man,* he thought worriedly, clinging on to the trunk as the tree rattled. *This tree is hundreds of years old – and he's bringing it down just by hitting it?*

The Interceptor laughed maniacally, continuing to whack the trunk of the tree. It rattled even quicker, coming loose from the ground. *"I like it!"*

"Oh, I can see that!" Haiba yelled, as the tree began to shake and rattle all around. The leaves rustled and the branches began to snap.

The Interceptor let out another one of his eagle screeches as the tree came loose from the ground, toppling over with Haiba still hanging on to it.

"*Whoa!*" Haiba screamed, as the tree crashed to the ground. He clung on to the trunk, not daring for a second to even let go.

His heart stopped when he saw the Interceptor towering over him.

Now what?

AN: I love the Interceptor. It's crazy, kooky villains like him that just make my day. It's hard to believe that game shows can actually have villains. I would apologise for stealing the character, but the show got cancelled years ago, so it doesn't really matter. I could probably purchase the rights for practically nothing.

Anyway, can Haiba escape? Will Simba cross the river? Is Nala going to start a career presenting game shows on TV? All the answers – except for the last one – will be revealed tomorrow! If you wish, you may now play dramatic music.

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: I Like It

AN: Time for the end of this completely rigged challenge. Will the Interceptor win?

DarkDevil002: The Interceptor moves in mysterious circles. Why did he go for Haiba first? Maybe it was for a reason. Maybe it wasn't. That's the kind of thing you have to figure out for yourself.

KaylaDestroyer: Oh, I love my running gags. Expect about three hundred million more of them over the course of the series. Laugh! Or else...

Chapter Seven: I Like It

Simba's claws dug into the edge of the river, and he slowly pulled himself up onto dry land, sighing. "Oh, man," he moaned. "I never knew this leg could be so much trouble. Not even exercising helps. What do I have to do to be happy?" he wondered aloud as he lay on his back.

Quit... Simba's voice sounded quiet and distant in his head. "Quit?" Simba shook his head, eyes closed. "No way. I can't quit. I have... responsibilities. Plus it'd really set me on the right track when I become the King – if I don't get killed before then."

Slowly getting to his paws, Simba proceeded to walk along the edge of a river, towards a thorny bush in the distance. *Nala, I'm nearing the bush, he reported. After I get there, where am I supposed to go?*

Simba, I've got a bit of a problem on my paws right now, replied Nala. *Just wait there. The Interceptor's got Haiba!*

He's got Haiba? Simba gasped. *Where? What's he doing?*

The jungle, said Nala. *The Interceptor started chasing him, and now Haiba's about to be eaten by him!*

Oh, for crying out loud! Simba exclaimed. *Couldn't the Interceptor have come after me instead? Saves me having to worry about everyone else who means something to me!*

Simba, stay where you are, Nala advised. *I'm not having you endangering yourself, too. Haiba should be able to take care of himself. Just concentrate on getting to the finish line. Start running until you get to a kind of... vine hammock that stretches out between two trees. Tell me when you get there. Gotta go.*

Simba looked ahead, and started walking. "Straight on it is," he sighed, picking up his pace, desperate to try and ignore the throbbing pain in his leg. *I'm taking a vacation tomorrow...*

Haiba rolled away as the Interceptor took a swipe at him, letting loose with more of his trademark eagle screeches. "No fair!" Haiba cried, falling from the overturned tree and hitting the ground – which was littered with jagged branches – below. "Ow!"

Haiba winced as pain shot up through his side, the jagged edges of the branches cutting deep into his skin. The wounds stung him – as if he were being stabbed right through the stomach. "This is ridiculous. Do you ever give a cub a break?"

The Interceptor swiped at Haiba again, only for him to dodge away just in time. "Get over here!" the Interceptor snarled, clearly showing signs of agitation. He wasn't in the mood to play games with this cub.

Haiba proceeded to run away, stumbling slightly as the pain continued to pester him. *Oh, gosh,* he thought as he sprinted through the jungle. *Oh, gosh. If the Interceptor doesn't kill me, then the running will.*

Haiba, what's going on? Nala's voice asked in his head. *Have you got away from the Interceptor yet?*

Not exactly, replied Haiba, glancing behind. Screeching loudly, running after him, was the Interceptor. *I don't suppose you have any bright ideas, do you? Because one of them would really help right now!*

Get across the river, Nala instructed, in as calm a tone as she could possibly manage. *That's where Simba is. Follow the river until you get to a thorny bush, and then just keep going straight on. You have to run into Simba eventually.*

River, thought Haiba. *Got it.*

Haiba darted out of the jungle area, dashing for the river that was a few feet away. He skidded to a halt at the edge. *I hope this water isn't too cold*, he hoped, before diving in.

The water turned out to be a lot more of a nuisance than Haiba expected. The water caused the deep cuts in his side to sting even more. *Ow*, he winced, wanting the pain to just all go away. *I suppose it just means the water's cleaning the wound*, he thought optimistically. *Doesn't mean it feels any better, though*.

He quickly scrambled for dry land, clambering to his paws on the opposite side of the river. Turning around, he saw the Interceptor standing on the other side. "Don't think that's gonna stop me," the Interceptor told him. "Water's no problem."

The Interceptor screeched, before tensing his body up and pouncing at Haiba. He did a fancy somersault, pulling off a front flip before landing right in front of Haiba. "See? It's not hard at all."

Haiba couldn't help but let out a girlish scream, before running along the river, just as Nala had instructed. *Gotta find Simba*, he told himself, his breathing becoming heavy. *Gotta find Simba...*

The Interceptor laughed evilly at the top of his voice. "*I like it!*" he cried, before running after Haiba. This cub didn't stand a chance. He was far too weak to outrun an expert like him. It wouldn't be long before he collapsed of exhaustion.

And that would be when the Interceptor closed in for the kill.

Nala leant out over the edge of the giant cliff she was on top of. It allowed a perfect view of all that was going on around her. She could see distant fields that were miles and miles away. "Haiba, you'd better pick up the pace," she muttered, a worried expression on her face. "Boy, is that Kazi going to get some nasty bruises when I'm finished with him..."

"You really wouldn't want to do that," said a voice from behind her.

Nala turned around to see Kazi standing before her, a rather serious look on his face. "Oh. It's you," she said, frowning at the sight away. "It's not very nice to knock a girl out, you know. Maybe I should return the favour – *twice*."

"Look, I'm sorry, okay?" Kazi took a step forward, speaking in a hushed tone. "I can finally talk to you properly, now that I know he's not watching."

"What?" Nala didn't understand. "What the heck are you talking about?"

"The Interceptor," replied Kazi. "He was watching me before, to make sure that I did what he asked me to."

"I'm not following," said Nala. "Are you trying to tell me that the Interceptor *forced* you into organising this challenge?"

Kazi shook his head. "There was no challenge in the first place," he revealed. "There's no such thing as the Royal Challenge Authority. It was something he made up. It was all part of his evil plan."

"I'm still not getting you," Nala said. "So... the Interceptor has planned all of this? You're not really some kind of fancy representative after all?"

"Not in the slightest," Kazi responded. "I'm just very well spoken. The Interceptor got lucky when he kidnapped me."

"*Kidnapped* you?" Nala exclaimed, her eyes widening. "Look, I don't know what's going on here, but—"

"He took me," Kazi interrupted. "He took me from my family, and forced me to pretend that I was a representative of the Royal Challenge Authority – again, something that doesn't even exist. He made up the challenge. It was all a plan so he could kill Simba."

"Kill Simba?" Nala raised an eyebrow. "Why would he want to do that?"

"It was an order," Kazi explained. "The Interceptor is a kind of... assassin-for-hire. Say, one lion wants another lion dead, then that lion would call the Interceptor to do it for him. Simba's parents called in the Interceptor. They wanted their own son dead."

Nala couldn't help but gasp, her eyes wide with horror. "Simba's *parents* got the Interceptor to *kill* him? But... but why would they even—"

"I don't know," interrupted Kazi, shaking his head. "All I know is that they don't want the Prince of the Pride Lands alive. I can't figure it out, but I've got a feeling that you'll be able to find out somewhere. All I heard was the word..."

"So if the challenge is fake..." Nala slowly realised. "Then that means that we can cheat – right?"

Kazi nodded. "Absolutely. You could murder the Interceptor yourself if you wanted to. It's not like I'm going to stop you. I just want to go home."

Nala smiled. "Kazi, I think I just might be able to help you with that."

When he got to the vine hammock, Simba couldn't help but take a little nap in it. He figured that he deserved a little break for his hard work. What he needed was a good snooze...

Simba!

Awakening with a scream, Simba jumped out of the hammock, collapsing to the ground. *Wh-what is it, Nala?*

This is no time to take a nap, you klutz! Do you think that the Interceptor is going to stand by and just let you sleep away?

Well, I would have hoped he might show a little sympathy, but—

Enough! Nala interrupted. *Look, I've got some good news and bad news. The good news is, you don't have to worry about rules. The challenge isn't real.*

What do you mean, it isn't real? Simba asked. *Last time I checked, this was organised and planned out and hurt a whole lot and—*

Simba, just listen to me, Nala interrupted. *The Interceptor planned all of this. Kazi isn't really a representative for the Royal Challenge Authority. In fact, that doesn't even exist! He forced Kazi into acting like this was a real, proper challenge. Really, your parents just hired the Interceptor to... She hesitated for a moment. They hired the Interceptor to kill you.*

"What?" Simba yelled in shock. "They hired the Interceptor to *kill* me? Nala, that's – that's... I don't even *know*! This is crazy! How can they even do that? I mean, sending me to that camp was one thing, but *this* is just plain murder! What the heck have I done to them? Or..." His eyes narrowed his suspicion. "What has someone *else* done to them?"

Simba, this isn't the time to think about that, Nala told him. *We can discuss it later. Right now, you've gotta work on stopping the Interceptor. Since there aren't any real rules, you can just stop him any way you want! Drop him in a hole! Drown him in the river! Anything! Just finish him now!*

Simba thought for a second, and then nodded. *Okay,* he agreed. *Okay. I'll do what I can. But first I've gotta find Haiba. I hope he's not gotten himself into too much trouble.*

I've gotten myself into too much trouble, Haiba thought as he ran along the edge of the river, the Interceptor right behind him. "Hey, Interceptor, would it kill you to take a little break?"

The Interceptor just chuckled. "*I like it!*" he screamed, before grabbing Haiba by the tail and yanking him backwards.

"You like everything, from the looks of things," Haiba retorted, staring up at the Interceptor, who was hunched over him menacingly.

"It's over for you," the Interceptor said. A sly smile then crossed his face. "Once I've sorted out one other little cub who needs a good slash to the throat. Let's go."

He then dragged Haiba away by the scruff of his neck, causing him to cry out in pain. "Let go of me!"

"I don't think so," said the Interceptor with a sinister laugh. "*I like it!*"

"Yeesh, how many times is he going to say that?"

Simba skidded to a halt, his heart stopping when he saw Haiba being dragged across the hard ground by the Interceptor. "Haiba!" he cried, running towards his injured friend. "What the heck's he done to you?"

"It's a long story," Haiba moaned. He looked seconds away from slipping into unconsciousness.

"You must be Simba," said the Interceptor. "The *real* prize of this 'challenge'. I take it your little girlfriend has figured out

that this is fake, yeah?"

Simba nodded, staring at the Interceptor with a brave face on. "Yeah. I knew it wouldn't have been too hard for her."

The Interceptor screeched at Simba, causing him to stumble backwards in surprise. "Whoa!" Simba cried in shock. "What the heck do you call *that*?"

The Interceptor slammed Haiba's face into the ground, knocking him out instantly. "I've come for you, Simba. Your parents have paid me handsomely for undertaking this little job."

"Oh, yeah?" said Simba, backing away cautiously. "And just how are they planning on rewarding you?"

"That's none of your concern," replied the Interceptor, stepping forth to finish what he had started. "Now just stay where you are, and I'll try not to make this hurt as much as it should."

Simba gasped in fright as he saw the Interceptor's long, threatening claws extend. "Those are some big slicers," he commented nervously, continuing to back away. "Wow. You could cut an orange exactly in half with one of them."

"Talk won't get you anywhere," said the Interceptor, continuing to advance towards Simba.

"You night want to stop yourself," Simba warned. "Uh... you never know what you might accidentally be walking into."

The Interceptor chuckled, looking up at the sky. "Oh, *I like it*!" he exclaimed, taking another step forward. "Now you're just using pathetic excuses to try and live that little bit longer—"

The Interceptor let out a cry of surprise as the ground collapsed beneath him, and he was sent hurtling into the darkness below, snarling and screaming all the way.

"I did warn you," Simba said, standing right beside the hole that suddenly appeared in the ground. *Thanks for the warning, Nala. Never knew the ground in this area was weak.*

My pleasure, Simba, replied Nala. *I'm always happy to assist you in... not dying. Now meet me at the top of this cliff. I want to go home!*

What, you thought I was going to say no?

"All in all, this is a very happy day," Simba said with a smile as he walked into the den. Haiba lay in the corner, and leaning over him was a very sympathetic, nursing Nala. "We didn't die, managed to get rid of a very nasty villain, and also returned a lost cub home. Doesn't it just make you feel all warm inside?"

"I feel as cold as ice," Haiba complained, a miserable frown on his face as Nala wiped some blood away from his muzzle. "But at least there's no more Interceptor to beat me up."

"He really should have watched out for the ground," Simba said. "Maybe then he wouldn't have fallen to his death thousands of miles down."

"Still doesn't explain one thing," said Nala. "What about your parents? They..." She looked around, before speaking in a whisper. "They tried to have you killed. Aren't you even going to say *anything* about it to them?"

Simba shook his head. "Not at all. As far as they're concerned, I know nothing about it. I'm not letting them in on *anything* until I've figured this all out. Something's up with them – and I've gotta found out before they actually *do* manage to kill me."

"Well, it won't be done by the Interceptor," said Haiba. "You have *no* idea how thankful I am for that."

Sitting in the darkness, laying in a pile of rubble, the Interceptor chuckled to himself, staring up at the shaft of light that was shining down on him.

Slowly climbing to his paws, rocks rumbling from beneath him, the Interceptor continued to chuckle. "Oh... wow..."

Staring up at the shining light, the Interceptor laughed at the top of his voice. He was alive, and right now, that meant one thing.

He could have his revenge.

"I like it!"

The End

AN: The Interceptor's alive? Whatever could this possibly mean? It's not like he's coming back or anything. To think that would just make you insane. But then again, I do display my fair share of insanity now and then...

NEXT TIME: A bratty little cub called Tara – who is obsessed with gothic culture and magic – is granted evil powers. Powers that she uses to reshape the world as she sees fit..